In the Claims:

The following listing reflects amendments to the claims and replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in this application.

1-2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously presented) The process of claim 1, wherein the protein is a transmembrane protein.

4. (Currently amended) A process for the preparation of a protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd which specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus, or for the preparation of a functionally equivalent fragment thereof, comprising the steps of:

i) contacting cells with a preparation of E2;

ii) obtaining a membrane preparation from cells exhibiting binding to E2; and

iii) purifying said protein or said functionally equivalent fragment thereof from said preparation.

5-6. (Cancelled)

7. (Currently amended) A process according to ~~any one~~ either of claims ~~2-4~~ 3 or 4 wherein the preparation is purified by ammonium sulphate precipitation employing ammonium sulphate at between 33 and 50% saturation.

8. (Currently amended) A process according to ~~any one~~ either of claims ~~2-4~~ 3 or 4 further comprising at least one hydrophobic interaction chromatography procedure.

9. (Currently amended) A process according to ~~any one~~ either of claims ~~2-4~~ 3 or 4 further comprising at least one acetone precipitation procedure.

10. (Currently amended) A process for the preparation of a protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd which specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus, or a functionally equivalent fragment thereof, comprising the steps of:

i) contacting mammalian cells with a preparation of E2;

ii) obtaining a membrane preparation from the mammalian cells selected for binding to E2;

iii) precipitating the preparation with ammonium sulphate at less than 33% saturation and retaining the supernatant;

iv) precipitating the supernatant with ammonium sulphate at between 33 and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate;

v) resuspending the precipitate from step iv) in buffer and subjecting the resuspended precipitate to hydrophobic interaction chromatography and recovering the nonretained material to provide said protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd which specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus, or said functionally equivalent fragment thereof.

11-16. (Cancelled)

17. (Currently amended) A diagnostic kit comprising a protein having a molecular weight of about 24 kd, which specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus, or a functionally equivalent fragment thereof, and a labeled HCV E2 protein.

18-20. (Cancelled)

21. (Cancelled)

22. (Previously presented) A method for preparing a protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd which specifically binds to the E2 protein of hepatitis C virus, comprising the steps of:

i) obtaining a membrane preparation from mammalian cells that bind to E2;

ii) adding ammonium sulphate to said preparation at less than 33% saturation to produce a precipitate and a supernatant;

iii) adding ammonium sulphate to said supernatant at between 33 and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate;

iv) resuspending the precipitate from step iii) in buffer and subjecting the resuspended precipitate to hydrophobic interaction chromatography; and

v) recovering said protein.

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~~23~~. (Previously presented) The process of claim ~~22~~ wherein said mammalian cells are MOLT-4 cells.